



NEWS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

US Forest Service
Rocky Mountain Region
740 Simms Street
Golden, Colorado 80401

University of Wyoming, Ruckelshaus Institute on
Environment and Natural Resources
1000 E University Avenue
Laramie, Wyoming 82071

Contacts: Janelle Smith, US Forest Service, 303-275-5359 or janellesmith@fs.fed.us
Chamois Anderson, U. of Wyoming, (307) 766-2604 or cander50@uwyo.edu

Ruckelshaus Institute and US Forest Service Working Together to Conserve Wyoming's Open Space

LARAMIE, Wyo., May 16, 2011 – Recent state and national studies have shown that development of private lands in the West has reached unprecedented levels, leading resource managers to take actions and innovative approaches to better conserve these lands.

The Ruckelshaus Institute at the University of Wyoming has partnered with the U.S. Forest Service to develop the *Private Lands Conservation Toolkit and Training for Wyoming Land Managers*, a how-to guide with specific tools and strategies for conserving private lands.

“While Wyoming is known for its open spaces, private lands feature some of the most vital wildlife habitats in the state, including winter habitat and migration corridors,” says Tex Taylor, professor in UW’s Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics and ENR Senior Advisor. “If those lands continue to be developed, there will be a significant decrease in areas that benefit the state’s natural resources and provide for our quality of life.”

The Ruckelshaus Institute and the Forest Service have made it a priority to address the loss of open space in Wyoming. “It is important that we all work together, and empower land managers with the tools and knowledge to address this growing challenge,” said Rick Cables, Regional Forester, US Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region.

Retention of open space on private lands is key to land management efforts, particularly since the Rocky Mountain West’s population is growing faster than any other region in the United States, says Taylor. “Rural development in the West is one of the main factors contributing to the loss of privately-held open space. And with nearly half of Wyoming under private ownership, the loss of open space to rural development is of particular concern,” says Taylor who over the last decade has contributed economic analysis for the Ruckelshaus Institute’s Wyoming Open Spaces Initiative.

The U.S. Forest Service projects that nearly 22 million acres of private, rural lands adjacent to national forest and grasslands nationwide will undergo residential development by 2030. According to the American Farmland Trust, more than 2.6 million acres of “prime” ranchland in Wyoming could potentially be developed by 2020. This

- More -

represents nearly one-third of the total “prime” ranchland identified in Wyoming, according to the analysis. “Prime” ranchland is defined as quality agricultural lands that also have desirable wildlife characteristics. In addition, five counties in Wyoming: Sublette (13th), Park (15th), Uinta (19th), Big Horn (20th), and Fremont (21st) ranked in the top 25 counties in the Rocky Mountain Region for future development of open space.

The goal of the toolkit is to stem the development of private lands, which can:

- 1) help buffer public lands,
- 2) reduce wildfire potential and other natural disaster risks to communities,
- 3) protect critical wildlife corridors and habitat,
- 4) provide greater access to public lands for recreation,
- 5) preserve important watersheds, and
- 6) maintain scenic vistas and culturally significant landscapes.

The resource guide will be mailed to land managers throughout Wyoming and is also available online at www.uwyo.edu/toolkit.

For more information visit:

- University of Wyoming, Ruckelshaus Institute: <http://www.uwyo.edu/enr/ruckelshaus-institute/>
- US Forest Service, Open Space Conservation: <http://www.fs.fed.us/openspace/>

###